

"AFTER THE BEEP"

A Sermon By

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"AFTER THE BEEP"

TEXT: "When I called...no one answered...and
when I spoke...no one listened"

(Isaiah 66: 1b)

INTRODUCTION

About fifteen years ago, a marvelous new gadget began to appear in many American homes - the answering machine. And as a result, "After the Beep" has become one of the most familiar phrases in our language. Now, while there are a few creative souls "out there" (and you may be one of them) who try to entertain us with some witty "out-of-the-ordinary" messages on their machines, we all pretty much know what to expect when we hear the machine pick up. Right? One might as well simply record,

"Hello....this is YOU-KNOW-WHO, and we're
not YOU-KNOW-WHERE....so at the YOU-KNOW-
WHEN....please leave a YOU-KNOW-WHAT....
and we will YOU-KNOW...."

Some people have an ambivalence to "The Beep". I know at times I do...coming down with an "affliction" whose symptoms only seem to strike when I'm invited to leave a message..."after the beep". I find at times I stumble around a bit and fumble the words...and offer up some incoherent, dumb and non-sensical words on those little machines.

Generally, I'm fairly calm and relaxed when speaking with some one "face to face"...the thoughts get organized easily and the voice is natural, but then when I'm asked to leave a message "after the beep" in response to some not so witty invitation, I'm not that effective...remember that, please. My confidence goes down and my coherency gets a bit muddled...becoming a verbal jelly-fish. A most creative soul out in Nebraska recorded this message on his machine which rather accurately describes my affliction.

"To speak or not to speak, that is the question!
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to leave a mes-
sage after the beep, or to take up arms against
a sea of answering machines, and, by opposing, end
them! To dial...to speak...no more! Thus do
answering machines do make cowards of us all!"

DEVELOPMENT

The amazing marvels of technology are here to stay and cannot be reversed and we might as well as get use to it.

Why, already the telephone system is offering far more than I am capable of dealing with and understanding. I still get confused as to which is the star and which the pound button. And gone are the days when a telephone was simply a number pad from 0 to 9. Call waiting, call transferring, speed dialing to a bank of coded numbers, last number redial, three way calls, voice mail menu and the star button for faxes and connections to computer modems. And the chances are the situation will become even more complex and difficult.

My wife is far more adept and into these things that I am and I know the day is coming when I call home and hear my wife's voice saying,

"Hi, dear...this is your wife. To find out what's for dinner, press 1. To apologize for what you said last night, press 2. To say, I love you, press 3.
✓ If you wish to speak to me personally, press 4 and wait. I'll be with you shortly!"

Some will say that one of the great advantages of this modern bit of technology is the ability to screen the calls. I don't, but I've been tempted. But this is the late nineties and one need to speak only to those with whom you wish to speak. And so marvelous is this feature that you can now add "Caller ID" as a feature to your list of options. Presto, the phone rings and there's the caller's name on digital display. You're home and the phone rings and caller ID says it's the minister calling and you don't feel like talking to your pastor...so you don't pick up. "It's the preacher from our church...let's have some fun with him...let's let the machine pick up and listen to him stammer and stumble around..." Thanks!

Or, suppose you're walking out the door. It's a beautiful and gorgeous day and your golf clubs are there in the car and then the phone rings. Uncertainty is apt to take over with some of you...

"Suppose it's the boss calling me....or what if it's the State Lottery office calling to give me good news about the lottery. Maybe it's my broker....."

FOLLOW UP

Screening calls has been around for a while. Matter of fact, it's been around a long time...long before Alexander Graham Bell got into it. Go back to the Bible....and you'll find that Adam and Eve did a fine job of screening their calls...long before technological wizardry got into it.

Go back to Genesis, chapter three and verse eight and there you can read about an important call that Adam and Eve received one gorgeous day and they weren't headed out to play golf either. They didn't want to pick up the phone because...remember... they were having fun and they thought it just might be God! And it was God. They had been fooling around and had broken some of God's rules and regulations and didn't want to answer for it. It says,

✓ "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the days. And the man, Adam, and his wife, Eve, hid themselves from the presence of the Lord, God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'....."

The SEPTUAGINT - the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament - translates the word "VOICE" with the Greek PHONES. This Greek word translated "voice" is, of course, the ancestor of our word, "phone".

Adam and Eve didn't need caller "ID". We read that "when they heard the voice of the Lord", they knew who was calling and they really didn't want to talk to God. Adam and Eve screened out that call. God began to leave a message, and it was a very important message.

To me, it's so wonderful that God, in all of His amazing grace, did not give up trying to get through to us. And that's the Good News of the Gospel. God has sent to this old world His ultimate message - His own Son. You might say that God got tired of leaving messages on our machines that we tended to ignore and so He finally came right down to where we are and confronted us "person to person". He came down and got involved in all of the grit and grime and grease of our human condition. As the Bible reminds us, "God, became flesh and dwelt among us". Think of it this way, if you will...

A friend of mine who has led several trips to the land where Jesus was born always puts in a voltage convertor for his trips. He explains that many countries insist on using 220 volts in electric outlets instead of the 110 as God intended, causing him to blow up several electric shavers. And so, now he puts a convertor in to scale down the voltage. Well, in a sense, that is what God did in the birth of Christ. The manger there in Bethlehem "stepped down the voltage" and reduced the shock of God actually visiting earth. Yes, God left a message for us. John puts it this way,

"This is the message....that we have heard from Him and now declare unto you...that God is LIGHT and in Him is no darkness at all. And if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to purify us from all unrighteousness....."

And friend, God's message to us, when He finally gets a clear line has not changed from His message of long ago to Adam and Eve....

"I love you despite your sin. And I promise you a Savior.
I have provided a covering for you....person to person.."

CLOSING In closing, let me just add this brief thought to what's been said. At times we may feel that the tables have been turned and it may seem to us that God is screening us out. I love that Dennis the Menace cartoon that shows Mr. Wilson nervously peaking out at Dennis from behind his living room drapes, obviously not wanting to be bothered. Dennis is standing on his wagon, having spotted the hiding Mr. Wilson and leaning over the fence he shouts to Mr. Wilson,

"Mr. Wilson....your answering machine isn't working.
It says you're not home....Mr. Wilson, your machine..."

Sometimes you may feel a bit like Dennis. You pray. Yet...you feel you're being ignored by God...that He is hid ng behind the drapes and the curtains of heaven. Maybe God is screening out my calls and my prayers and you wonder...

That's nothing new. It's there in the Old Testament...the prophets did their share of wondering and doubting. What is it that the psalmist said there in Psalm 88:

"I call to You every day, O Lord.....and I spread out my hands to You! Why, O Lord, do you reject me? Why do You hide Your face from me?" (Psalm 88: 9, 14)